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ABSTRACT

Presenting an overview of the theoretical perspective underlying work on text analysis in progress at the Center for the Study of Reading (Champaign-Urbana, Illinois), this report emphasizes the work that group has undertaken on stories for children in grades one through five. The report discusses three factors, drawn from a theoretical model, that plausibly influence involvement of the reader with a story: conflict, inside view, and point of view. The report presents the results of an exploratory coding of a sample of basal reader stories and children's trade books, and then discusses the coding, which revealed a distribution of types of conflict, inside view, and point of view that may increase the distance from the text that a reader feels and may provide inadequate preparation for the full range of stories that a skilled reader is likely to encounter. The report concludes that the characteristics of the texts that children are expected to read may hinder rather than help in the attainment of educational goals. (FL)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Reading Education Report No. 25

A NEW POINT OF VIEW ON CHILDREN'S STORIES

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Abstract

Recent work on text analysis at the Center for the Study of Reading and elsewhere has produced surprising results regarding the texts that children read in school. These results support the hypothesis that part of the difficulty children encounter in making the transition from beginning to skilled reading lies in an abrupt shift in text characteristics between lower and upper elementary school. Moreover, a comparison between school texts and popular trade books shows that the school texts may provide inadequate preparation for the texts that skilled readers need to master. Thus, characteristics of the texts that children are expected to read may hinder rather than help in the attainment of educational goals.

A New Point of View on Children's Stories

Whatever else one expects of education, two goals of reading instruction stand out. One is that a child develop a healthy appreciation for what reading can mean, including, one hopes, an enjoyment of reading for its own sake. Paired with this goal of developing positive attitudes is a second goal of developing in the reader the skills for reading, ultimately for reading with care and critical insight.

The task of selecting, designing, adapting, editing, or writing texts for children is immensely important in the process of attaining these educational goals. Work of Durkin (1978-79; 1981) and others, as well as simple classroom observation, shows that published materials influence teachers, students, and most classroom activities. But, unfortunately, there are few solid principles, or even good definitions of the issues, on which to base decisions about text selection. Complicating this is the fact that what we do know about the reading process says that small differences in texts may have significant effects on comprehension and enjoyment. This is especially true when we consider the relation of text characteristics to the reader's prior knowledge, values, and expectations (see Adams & Bruce, 1980).

A simple model for the effects of some text characteristics on the reader is shown in Figure 1. On the right side of the figure are shown two possible end states of the educational process, both of them

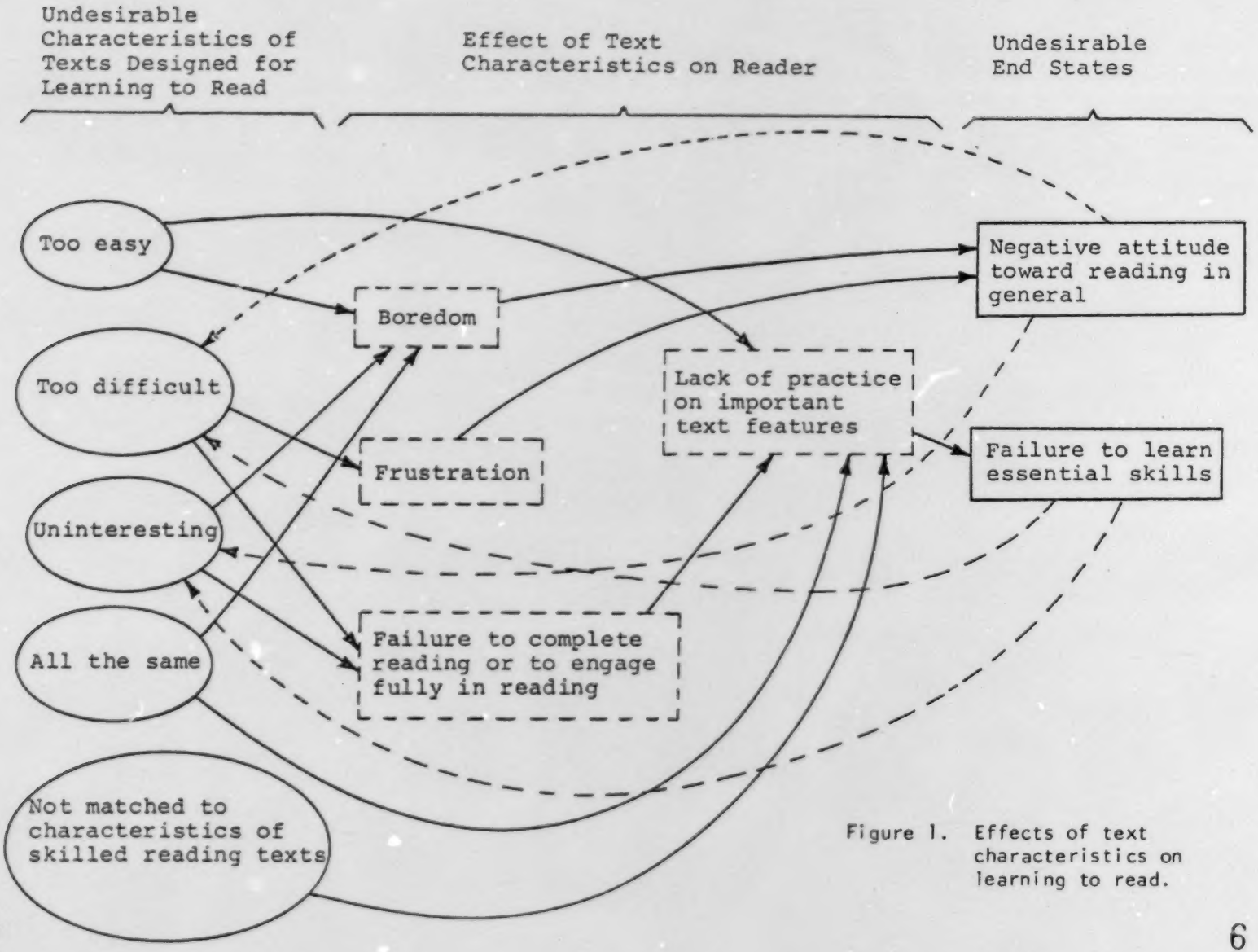
Undesirable Characteristics of Texts Designed for Learning to Read
Effect of Text Characteristics on Reader
Undesirable End States
Too easy
Too difficult
Uninteresting
All the same
Not matched to characteristics of skilled reading texts
Boredom
Frustration
Lack of practice on important text features
Failure to complete reading or to engage fully in reading
Negative attitude toward reading in general
Failure to learn essential skills

Figure 1. Effects of text characteristics on learning to read.

undesirable: (a) a negative attitude toward reading in general, and (b) failure to learn the skills essential for reading. These end states could be produced, via one or more intermediate states (shown in dashed boxes), by the use of texts with certain undesirable characteristics. Among these, there are five that warrant special attention. Texts may be too easy or too difficult. Even if they are at the right level of difficulty they may be uninteresting. If at the right level and interesting, there can still be problems if the texts children read are all the same. Finally, texts at the right level, which are interesting and diverse, may still be inappropriate if they are not matched to the texts that skilled readers read. Some interrelations of these characteristics and effects on the reader are shown in the figure. Solid arrows represent a causal relation between a text characteristic and an effect on the reader; dashed arrows represent the reciprocal influence that undesirable states in the reader have on text characteristics. The latter illustrates that text characteristics are, in fact, characteristics of the reader and text in interaction.

The connections made between text characteristics and effects on the reader in the figure show that the nature of the texts that children encounter while learning to read plays a major role in the development of their attitudes about reading and their reading skills. Texts that are too difficult may cause unnecessary problems at the time and generate frustration with reading that results in more general difficulties later

on. Texts that are too easy may bore a child, thus producing negative attitudes about reading that again lead to future difficulties. Moreover, easy texts may not expose children to many of the text features they must learn in order to become skilled readers. Characteristics of a text that contribute to interest and enjoyment likewise affect general attitudes about reading and, thereby, both current and future ability to read and comprehend. In sum, enjoyment and difficulty, each important in and of themselves, also affect each other.

The problem is not solved, however, by ensuring that texts are all interesting and at the right difficulty level. If the texts are all the same, the collection of texts may become boring, again leading to negative attitudes. Finally, if the range of texts used for learning to read fails to match the text that skilled readers are expected to read, then the child may simply not learn all the essential skills. To take an extreme case, if we expect skilled readers to learn to interpret poetry, we would not give them only science books.

To compound matters, attempts by publishers, teachers, and parents to select (or design) texts to match a child's reading level are fallible, since we have no solid means for assessing either a child's reading comprehension abilities or text difficulty, not even considering the problem of interaction between text and child, or long-range effects of teaching practices. And attempts to match texts to children via selection or adaptation of texts can introduce new and unexpected sources

of difficulties (Bruce & Rubin, 1981; Bruce, Rubin, & Starr, 1981; Davison, Kantor, Hannah, Hermon, Lutz, & Salzillo, 1980; Steinberg & Bruce, 1980).

Clearly, a better understanding of the properties of texts that contribute to a reader's difficulties and/or enjoyment is in order. This would facilitate the matching of texts to readers with varying skills, knowledge, and interests, and, perhaps just as important, show where well-intended mismatches have occurred. Knowing more about texts would also help in teaching, for example, in adjusting the balance between reading activities such as reading to children, sustained silent reading, and reading aloud. It could also help in identifying causes of specific reading difficulties and perhaps suggest strategies for reading which can be explicitly taught.

This paper presents a brief overview of the theoretical perspective underlying our work on text analysis, emphasizing our work on stories for children in Grades 1 through 5. The presentation is example-based; for more precise formulations of the concepts see Bruce (1980a; 1980b; in press), Bruce and Newman (1978), Newman (1980), and Steinberg and Bruce (1980). Three factors, drawn from a theoretical model, which plausibly influence involvement of the reader with a story and story comprehension difficulty, are discussed: conflict, inside view, and point of view. These factors imply techniques for classifying and evaluating texts. The paper presents the results of an exploratory coding of a sample of basal reader stories and children's trade books.

Briefly, the coding reveals a distribution of types of conflict, inside view, and point of view which may tend to increase the distance from the text that a reader feels and may provide inadequate preparation for the full range of stories (and other texts) that a skilled reader is likely to encounter. This has important implications for text selection and for ways to teach story understanding.

Conflict

Some form of conflict may be an essential ingredient for good stories (Bettelheim, 1976; Bruce, 1978). Consider, for instance, this excerpt from Helga's Dowry (de Paola, 1972). Helga, a troll, is trying to increase her dowry so that she can marry Lars. She has just struck a bargain: If she can chop and split the trees on a plot of land within a week, the land will become hers.

> "Oh what luck to find a greedy man.
> And now I'll chop as fast as I can.
> I'll swing my Troll axe so sharp and fine,
> And that mountain pasture will soon be mine!"
> warbled Helga.
>
> She chopped and chopped. But the forest seemed to grow larger every day that Helga worked.
>
> "I'd almost think there was Trollery afoot," said Helga, pausing to catch her breath.
>
> "There is!" said a tree with a laugh that shook all its branches.

"Plain Inge!" said Helga.

"I see you've out here trying to earn a dowry," bellowed Inge, who had turned herself into a tree.

"A dowry earned is as good as a dowry given," shouted back Helga.

"I'll make sure there's no dowry earned," yelled Tree-Inge. "Besides, our wedding is tomorrow. Lars couldn't wait!"

That did it. Helga was furious!

"I'll turn you into kindling wood!" cried Helga, who promptly turned herself into a boulder!

Rolling down the mountainside, Boulder-Helga headed for Tree-Inge. But Tree-Inge just moved aside. Madder than ever, Boulder-Helga rolled up the mountainside to get a better start.

But when she came tumbling down again, Tree-Inge moved aside once more.

All day, the battle raged. The air was filled with flying timber.

Then suddenly it was quiet.

Helga changed back into herself again and Tree-Inge shook with laughter.

"Giving up?" she asked.

"You'll see," answered Helga, walking off to the rich man's house.

Although this is just an excerpt, one can see aspects of larger plot elements--Lars' abandonment of Helga, the competition between Helga and Inge, Helga's determination and resourcefulness. In particular, one can see various conflicts. First, Helga has an <u>environmental conflict</u> with respect to her goal to have the trees chopped down. But the story

would be impoverished if this were its only conflict. In fact, Helga also has an obvious interpersonal conflict with Inge because of their competing goals to win Lars. Other related interpersonal conflicts are between Lars and Helga and between Helga and the greedy rich man. In other stories there are also internal conflicts in which a single character struggles to resolve incompatible goals within himself or herself.

Conflict is a major source of complexity for stories. As we can see in the Helga example, understanding of conflict implies understanding characters' goals, how their goals interrelate, and how plans to achieve those goals mesh or clash. Another important observation is that the characters' actions are not just physical movements, but social actions (Bruce, 1975, 1980b) designed to have effects on other characters: Inge gloats, Helga threatens, Inge gloats again, Helga tricks, and so on. Most of their actions are conditioned by their respective beliefs about the world, about each other, and about each others' beliefs. The act of interpretation of their actions depends upon beliefs about their beliefs. Such belief-based interpretation is sometimes needed in the case of environmental conflict, often for interpersonal conflict, and always for internal conflict. Not surprisingly, inferences about beliefs and interactions of plans can become quite complex (see Newman, 1980).

The fact that readers must infer beliefs, or, in other words, come to understand a character's model of the world, in order to understand social interaction among characters, is one reason why conflict often induces greater involvement with the characters. This, in turn, makes the conflicts more important to the reader, and thus the story itself becomes more engaging.

Inside View

In the conflict example just discussed, we saw how the need to understand characters' beliefs, which is vital to conflict development, has the side effects of complicating the reader's task and facilitating involvement with the characters. We learn of these beliefs through a variety of devices, including inferences, from a character's utterances or other actions, inferences from what other characters say or do, and direct or indirect quotation of thoughts. Inside view encompasses the latter device as well as direct statements about a character's values and feelings.

The extent to which an author lets us see inside a character in this way affects to a great extent how much we are able to empathize with the character. It also adds to the processing load for reading because it permits, and then requires, the reader to keep track of multiple, often conflicting, views of the world.

To make some of these distinctions more concrete, consider the following excerpt from a George and Martha story (Marshall, 1974) called "Split Pea Soup:"

> Martha was very fond of making split pea soup. Sometimes she made it all day long. Pots and pots of split pea soup.
>
> If there was one thing that George was not fond of, it was split pea soup. As a matter of fact, George hated split pea soup more than anything else in the world. But it was so hard to tell Martha.
>
> One day after George had eaten ten bowls of Martha's soup, he said to himself, "I just can't stand another bowl. Not even another spoonful."
>
> So, while Martha was out in the kitchen, George carefully poured the rest of his soup into his loafers under the table. "Now she will think I have eaten it."
>
> But Martha was watching from the kitchen.

George and Martha are the main characters in this story (as in all the George and Martha stories). What is especially interesting in this excerpt is that the perspective alternates between them. (This is made even clearer by the pictures that accompany the text.) A consequence of the shifting perspective is that it is plausible to have an inside view of each character. We see Martha's fondness for making split pea soup as well as George's dislike of eating it.

The amount of inside view in a story can vary greatly, from none at all to that found in stories such as Ramona the Brave (Cleary, 1975),

that are essentially narrated (cf. Booth, 1961) by a character's thoughts. High inside view undoubtedly increases the possibility for strong involvement of the reader with a character. It is reasonable to suspect that different amounts of inside view have different effects on enjoyment and difficulty, and that the diversity of exposure will have consequences for the development of comprehension skills.

Point of View

The fact that the amount of inside view varies is but one example of a more general phenomenon of stories: The reader is not permitted to see everything that pertains to the events of the story (even in the case of the so-called "omniscient" perspective). Instead, the reader sees the story world as it might be perceived from a particular point of view.

A Formal Model for Point of View

Traditional classifications of point of view have provided only a handful of categories. One such classification suggests that the primary distinguishing feature is person (first, second, or third). Another provides for omniscient, limited omniscient, objective, and first person accounts (see Perrine, 1966). The problem with any of these traditional classification schemes is that they cannot encompass more than a few of the major dimensions along which narration varies (see Booth, 1961, for a summary).

For example, the so-called "omniscient" point of view is sometimes used to describe a story in which events are described from the spatial perspective of more than one character. It is also applied in cases where either the overall amount of inside view is high, or where an inside view for more than one character is given. These features do not always coincide. A more fruitful approach may be to identify the relevant features or dimensions first, as Booth, Chatman (1978), and others have begun to do, and then select subsets of those dimensions for specific purposes.

Consider, for the moment, just two of the distinctions pertinent to narration: person, and an aspect of rhetorical form that we call engagement (see Table 1). A story can be told using the syntactic form of first person ("I," "me," etc.) or third person ("he," "she," etc.), ignoring at this time the less common use of second person. Regardless of the person, a story may be told by a narrator who is engaged or not in the events of the story.

For the case of first person stories, engagement is the crisp distinction between stories such as Huckleberry Finn (Twain, 1961), in which the narrator (Huck) describes events in his life, and stories of the Uncle Remus type, in which the narrator (Uncle Remus) describes events that do not affect him directly.

Table 1

Point of View Types

	Person	
Engagement	First	Third
Yes	Engaged Narrator	In-Effect Narrator
No	Unengaged Narrator	Observer

For the case of the third person stories, the narrator may be an unengaged observer, the implied author, who relates actions but does not participate in them. There is also an important case of third person narration, identified by Booth (1961), in which we see the world so much through one character's eyes that the story is, in effect, narrated by that character. We call this form, in-effect narration. Thus, we can have a third person story with engaged narration.

The distinctions of person and engagement thus define four story types. These have different structural characteristics in terms of our formal model. The model, which is developed and discussed in Bruce (in press), essentially begins with an examination of what we mean by the word "narrator." This indicates that stories may be narrated at more than one level. For example, if Huck narrates his story, then there must be an author (the implied author) who has created Huck the narrator. The implied author talks to an implied reader and the narrator, Huck, talks to an implied implied reader. Adding the real author to the model, we get these levels of communication:

Real author	⟶	Real reader
Implied author	⟶	Implied reader
Huck*	⟶	Implied implied reader

(The asterisk indicates the engagement of Huck in the story he tells.)

Multiple levels of rhetorical structure add variety and increase the range of possibilities for text interpretation. Do they make stories

more difficult to comprehend? Possibly, although a countervailing force is that the provision of additional narrators gives a reader more possibilities for engagement, thus facilitating comprehension.

For the purpose of discussion, we show in each example below the multiple levels of rhetorical structure. We have also used these structures as a framework for coding stories. However, the results reported here are only on the two types of person and the two types of engagement.

Observer

The simplest of the four point-of-view types that we will consider here is the observer account. In this type, the one who tells the story is not engaged in the events of the story, and the syntactic form is third person. For example, look at the following excerpt from The Three Billy Goats Gruff (M. Brown, 1957):

> Once upon a time there were three billy goats who were to go up to the hillside to make themselves fat, and the name of all three was "Gruff."
>
> On the way up was a bridge over a river they had to cross, and under the bridge lived a great ugly troll with eyes as big as saucers and a nose as long as a poker.
>
> So first of all came the youngest Billy Goat Gruff to cross the bridge. "Trip, trap! trip, trap!" went the bridge.

Using the notation introduced above, we can diagram the rhetorical structure as follows:

Real author	——>	Real reader
Implied author	——>	Implied reader

Observer accounts are prevalent in children's stories--well over half of the stories we have analyzed--and understandably so since the form is relatively simple. But this simplicity may be misleading, especially when the observer account is coupled with a low inside view. In The Three Billy Goats Gruff, we are not told of the thoughts of the billy goats, and none of them are narrators. As a result, we do not know the motives of the first two goats when they tell the troll to wait for a bigger goat. Some readers think the little goats know what end awaits the troll while others think the goats are just saving themselves. Ambiguities such as this may lead to different interpretations of the entire plot of a story.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff is obviously a successful story, but it employs a point-of-view type (observer) and an amount of inside view (none) that does not always succeed. When the storyteller is neither identifiable as a person outside of the story nor as a character engaged in the story, the story itself becomes abstract in a way that increases what has been called "distance" for the reader. This may make the story less engaging and less interesting, and ultimately more difficult to read.

Unengaged Narrator

A second point-of-view type, called unengaged narration, is also told by one not engaged in the events of the story. Here, however, the story is told in first person. The storyteller is made explicit, so we get an additional level of communication. For example, consider Winnie-the-Pooh (Milne, 1926):

> Sometimes Winnie-the-Pooh likes a game of some sort when he comes downstairs, and sometimes he likes to sit quietly in front of the fire and listen to a story.
>
> This evening--
> "What about a story?" said Christopher Robin.
> "What about a story?" I said.
> "Could you very sweetly tell Winnie-the-Pooh one?"
> "I suppose I could," I said. "What sort of stories does he like?"
> "About himself. Because he's that sort of Bear."
> "Oh, I see."
> "So could you very sweetly?"
> "I'll try," I said.
> So I tried.
>
> Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday,
> Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest all by himself under the name of Sanders.

A character, identified here as "Father" narrates the first part of Winnie-the-Pooh in first person, but then, beginning with the familiar

"Once upon a time . . .," he becomes an unengaged narrator for a story about Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends. The rhetorical structure for unengaged narration is similar to that of observer accounts, the principal difference being an additional level of communication:

Real author	——>	Real reader
Implied author	——>	Implied reader
Father	——>	Christopher Robin

Engaged Narrator

A case of correspondence between person and rhetorical form is the following excerpt, told in first person and exhibiting engaged narration. Written in a child's version of Sam Spade style, it is from Nate the Great (Sharmat, 1972). Note that this rhetorical form fosters a high inside view, since we see everything through the narrator's thoughts:

> I went to Annie's house. Annie has brown hair and brown eyes. And she smiles a lot. I would like Annie if I liked girls.
>
> She was eating breakfast. Pancakes. "I like pancakes," I said. It was a good breakfast. "Tell me about your picture," I said.
>
> "I painted a picture of my dog, Fang," Annie said. "I put it on my desk to dry. Then it was gone. It happened yesterday."

In the Nate the Great example, we have an implied author and a created narrator (Nate). We also have the hint of a third narrator,

namely, Annie, who tells, to Nate, her story of losing her picture. Adding Annie to our model, we would have four levels of communication; the basic story, however, has just three:

Real author	——>	Real reader
Implied author	——>	Implied reader
Nate*	——>	Implied implied reader

In-Effect Narrator

The final point-of-view type to be considered here is in-effect narration. Although it uses the syntactic third person, it effectively creates a narrator out of the thoughts of one character. In terms of a traditional point-of-view classification scheme, in-effect narration can be seen as the extreme form of limited omniscience, that is, everything is presented from the spatial perspective of one character and there is a high inside view, but only for that one character. For example, consider the following excerpt from Ramona the Brave:

> Ramona hoped their mother would be home from her errand, whatever it was. She couldn't wait to tell what had happened and how she had defended her big sister. Her mother would be so proud, and so would her father when he came home from work and heard the story. "Good for you, Ramona," he would say. "That's the old fight!" Brave little Ramona.

Notice that the passage does not relate any specific actions, but rather that Ramona "hoped" and "couldn't wait," that her mother "would be proud," and her father "would say." The author has tried to give us

a view of Ramona's thoughts just as she might give us a view of the house where Ramona lives.

The rhetorical structure for in-effect narration is the same as that for engaged narration:

Real author	——→	Real reader
Implied author	——→	Implied reader
Ramona*	——→	Implied implied reader

A Look at Stories for Children

Previous Work

Factors such as conflict, inside view, and point of view are important both in a theory of stories and in a theory of skilled reading. Do they matter for children learning to read? Are children sensitive to the distinctions? Do children's texts vary significantly in terms of the factors? Since our theories of skilled reading are still in their nascent stages, it is difficult to answer these questions, and it might be considered premature to do so. On the other hand, there are some intriguing findings that suggest further exploration will be productive.

First, recent work of Green and Laff (1980) has shown that children as young as 5 years old are sensitive to subtle differences in literary style, being able, for instance, to distinguish the rhymes of Virginia Kahl from those of Dr. Seuss. Hay and Brewer (1981) have reported similar results on sensitivity to point-of-view differences.

They found that even 3-year-olds could make correct judgments about the age (adult vs. child) and sex of the narrator of a story that was read to them.

Second, a previous story survey (Steinberg & Bruce, 1980) points to major differences in the diversity of conflict types and rhetorical structures in several important categories of texts. Specifically, the range in low-level (Grades 1-3) basal reader stories is much restricted relative to that of either upper-level (Grades 4-5) basals or trade books. Moreover, there are types not uncommon in adult texts that are found rarely, if at all, in even the upper-level trade books.

Third, the study just mentioned also looked at the relationship between higher-level features of stories and readers' preferences. There was a statistically significant correlation between the amount of inside view and reader preference. The results are significant even when calculated separately for upper-level or lower-level texts. This result is for adult ratings of inside view and preference, and needs to be compared to children's preference ratings. Nevertheless, it suggests that inside view and other rhetorical devices may be of general importance for creating and maintaining reader interest.

Fourth, recent work on narrative structure in the oral and written traditions of various cultures, e.g., Hawaiian talk-stories (Watson-Gegeo & Boggs, 1977), Athabaskan stories (Scollon & Scollon, 1980), and Black folk tales and oral narratives (Labov, 1973; Smitherman, 1977), has

shown major differences among these cultures in rhetorical style, narrative conventions, and story content. These differences are not yet well understood, but it is likely that they have consequences for children learning to read. The few cases where cultural differences of this sort have been taken into account in teaching reading have yielded positive results (e.g., Au, 1980).

Fifth, there is a growing body of rhetorical theory (Applebee, 1978; Booth, 1961; Bruce, in press; Chatman, 1978; Holland, 1968; Iser, 1974; Rosenblatt, 1978) which is helping to make traditional distinctions more precise and more amenable to use in analyzing stories. These theories also point to the importance of rhetorical features in the act of reading.

Sixth, the legitimate concern with readability of texts for children has been shown to be ill-served by the readability formula approach (Davison, et al., 1980). If our concern goes beyond decoding and so-called "literal comprehension," we should consider features that contribute to conceptual complexity as well as those that may affect lexical and syntactic load. Perhaps, in addition, we should consider readability (in its most limited sense) in the context of other issues such as reader involvement, which may be affected by types of conflict, inside view, and point of view.

Methodology

The sample for our study of the variation in conflict, inside view, and point of view in children's stories comprised 200 texts. These were drawn randomly from four groups, three leading basal reading series, which I will refer to as Basal A, Basal B, and Basal C, and a collection of trade books. The trade books were drawn from several published lists; most (62%) were on lists called "Children's Choices" that are compiled on the basis of children's preferences by the International Reading Association together with the Children's Book Council and published each fall in The Reading Teacher.[1] Each group was thus represented by 50 books. The sets of 50 were subdivided by grade level, 10 from each of Grades 1 through 5.

The stories were analyzed in terms of a number of features, including author commentary, number of rhetorical levels, focus characters versus point-of-view characters, and rhetorical form. Below, I describe just those categories that relate to conflict, inside view, and point of view.

For conflict, each story was rated on a scale of 0 to 3 for the overall intensity of environmental, interpersonal, and internal conflicts. A rating of 0 meant that there was no conflict of that type; 3 meant there was conflict of that type and that it was significant for the characters and the story. A story with no conflicts of any type would get a rating of three 0's.

For inside view, a similar scale was used to indicate essentially no insight into any character's thoughts and feelings at one extreme to a deep view of one or more characters at the other extreme. To describe the point-of-view coding scheme in full would require a discussion beyond the scope of this paper (but see Bruce, in press). Essentially, however, stories in the sample were classified by person and engagement, that is, into one of the four point-of-view types described above.

Results

Results from this survey are consistent with others we have done (e.g., Steinberg & Bruce, 1980) in highlighting major differences across grade level and text category that may have important effects on learning to read. I will just mention a handful of these, pointing out where further research is needed.

First, we calculated the distribution of conflict types for the four story groups in our sample (Table 2). Stories with no conflicts were almost entirely in the lower-level basal categories. When there were conflicts in lower-level basal stories, the environmental type was the most common. Otherwise, interpersonal conflicts were the most common. This somewhat unusual distribution of conflict types in basal stories cannot optimally prepare children for understanding conflict forms encountered in reading other texts, and may even lead to difficulties.

Examination of inside view for the stories in our sample reveals an increase in the incidence of high inside view in the upper-level stories (Table 3). This was even more pronounced for the basal stories in the sample. This abrupt shift in a key story feature such as inside view is an important finding to investigate further, for it points to a possible explanation for some of the difficulty children encounter in the transition from lower- to upper-primary level reading.

In terms of point of view (Table 4), there are again results which point to the need for further studies. The most common type among the basal stories is the observer account. Other types which predominate in the trade books are found rarely, if at all, in the basals. In particular, the engaged participant type and the in-effect narration, both types which would seem to promote involvement of the reader, are less prevalent in the basals, especially at the lower levels. Research is needed here to determine the effects of the different point-of-view types.

Although there are a number of inferences one might draw after examining stories from individual aspects such as conflict, inside view, or point of view, it may be even more revealing to consider these aspects in combination. One combination, in particular, seems worth studying.

Table 2

Percentages of Stories with Different Types of Conflict

Text Group	Conflict Types				
	None[a]	E only[b]	P but not I[c]	P and I[d]	I but not P[e]
Basal A					
Grades 1-3	30	43.3	23.3	3.3	0
Grades 4-5	0	40.0	25.0	15.0	20.0
Basal B					
Grades 1-3	36.7	30.0	23.3	10.0	0
Grades 4-5	5.0	20.0	55.0	10.0	10.0
Basal C					
Grades 1-3	6.7	33.3	33.3	10.0	16.7
Grades 4-5	0	10.0	40.0	40.0	10.0
Trades					
Grades 1-3	0	13.3	46.7	16.7	23.3
Grades 4-5	0	15.0	40.0	40.0	5.0

[a] None = no conflict

[b] E only = only environmental conflict

[c] P but not I = interpersonal but not internal conflict

[d] P and I = interpersonal and internal conflict

[e] I but not P = internal but not interpersonal conflict

Table 3

Average Amount of Inside View

	Grades	
Text Group	1-3	4-5
Basal A	.8	2.05
Basal B	.4	1.25
Basal C	.93	1.95
Trades	1.3	1.9

Rating scale:

none	0
low	1
medium	2
high	3

Table 4

Percentages of Stories Told from

Different Points of View

	Unengaged		Engaged	
Text Group	Observer	Unengaged Narrator	In-effect Narrator	Engaged Narrator
Basal A				
Grades 1-3	96.7	0	0	3.3
Grades 4-5	75.0	5.0	5.0	15.0
Basal B				
Grades 1-3	93.3	6.7	0	0
Grades 4-5	65.0	0	20.0	15.0
Basal C				
Grades 1-3	83.3	0	6.7	10.0
Grades 4-5	75.0	0	10.0	15.0
Trades				
Grades 1-3	63.3	0	10.0	26.7
Grades 4-5	40.0	5.0	20.0	35.0

There are stories which have no conflict of any kind (a rating of 0 for each type) or only environmental conflict. Many people would say that such stories have no conflict; for the moment let us refer to them as "low-conflict" stories. Some of these low-conflict stories also have at most low inside views (0 or 1 on our rating scale). Of the low-conflict stories with low inside view some have an observer account point of view, that is, no identifiable narrator and no in-effect narration.

The kind of story just sketched would seem to lack many of the features that contribute to involvement of the reader. Without conflict it is more difficult to have the buildup of suspense and its resolution that Brewer and Lichtenstein (in press) identify as crucial to ratings of storyhood. Without an inside view the reader is left with tenuous references about a character's thoughts and feelings, and thus may have difficulty in empathizing with that character. With only observer accounts the reader cannot resort to identifying with or interacting with the narrator. In sum, although we might not want to reject this kind of story outright, it is unpromising as a candidate for engaging a reader, particularly a young reader. Moreover, such a story provides few anchor points for the reader to use in constructing an interpretation. Thus, although it is less complex than some other story types, it may be harder to comprehend. Finally, such a story fails to give children the opportunity to exercise the skills they need for comprehending

stories that do have conflict, events in characters' minds, or complex rhetorical structures.

If one were given the task of designing or selecting books for children, the type of story discussed above would not appear ideal. At the very least, it should be represented by no more than a small fraction of the children's library. A look at our coding results shows that this is not the case for basal readers in our sample (Table 5).

For the upper-level books, the low-conflict, low-inside-view, observer account stories constitute 10-15% of the samples. The same holds for the lower-level trade books. For the lower-level basals, however, the percentages range from 26.7 to 66.7, with a mean of 52.2% (versus 10% for the trades). Thus, over half of the stories in the readers in the first three grades have the combination of little or no conflict, low inside view and no identifiable narrator. This percentage seems high, especially since the existence of stories with conflict, inside view or more complex rhetorical structures in both low-level trades and the basals shows that it is possible to have such stories at the beginning reader's ability level.

Educational Implications

It is unusual for analyses of literature for children to consider rhetorical elements such as author-reader distance, commentary, point of view, or inside view, or details of character-to-character interaction.

Table 5

Percentages of Stories with (1) Low Conflict,

(2) Low Inside View, and (3) Observer Point of View

	Grades	
Text Group	1-3	4-5
Basal A	63.3	10.0
Basal B	66.7	15.0
Basal C	26.7	10.0
Trades	13.3	15.0

This is unfortunate, first, because there are a number of reasons to think that these features are important for comprehension and enjoyment, and second, because there is now evidence that categories of texts vary systematically in terms of these "higher-level story features." Clearly, more research is needed, but our results thus far already have a number of implications for educational practices.

Reading Aloud to Children

The positive relationship between reading aloud to children and their subsequent reading ability has been demonstrated in a number of studies (Chomsky, 1972; Durkin, 1966; McCormick, 1977). The results reported here provide an additional theoretical justification for these largely empirical findings. Namely, in order to develop the skills necessary to comprehend complex content and rhetorical structures, a reader may need to be exposed to them. Thus, reading aloud to children, in addition to fulfilling its frequently asserted motivating function, may also be supplying the only opportunity for many children, specifically those who do not have access to books outside of school, to develop the skills they need to become good readers.

Questions to Ask

The factors identified in this paper highlight areas that may cause difficulties for children in reading and skills that need to be learned.

These areas are often neglected, or at most, handled in a haphazard way when stories are discussed. A recognition of their contribution to story complexity together with our emerging taxonomy of conflict types, point-of-view types, and so on, should lead to more productive comprehension questions to ask of readers as well as specific concepts to teach.

Cultural Match

A third issue is improving the match of texts to readers with nonmainstream cultural backgrounds. Often, such readers are those having the most difficulty in comprehension, and their difficulties understanding texts might be due to mismatched expectations arising from cultural differences. Smitherman (1977) has argued that in Black folk tales, to take one example, there is a high incidence of commentary by the author and other distinctive rhetorical structures. These features reflect an oral literary tradition that developed partly as a consequence of the fact that reading and writing for slaves was against the law. There is little evidence that the characteristics of these Black folt tales, which are reflected in church language and street language, to name just two areas, are taken into account in designing texts for children to read. Further study of stories from different cultures and subcultures may reveal other distinct patterns. As a first step in improving the cultural match, we should at least diversify the diet of stories given to children.

Reader Involvement

The issue of reader involvement has been touched on at several places in this paper. It clearly plays an important role not only in a child's affective response to reading but also in his or her ultimate ability to read with comprehension. Another aspect of reader involvement should not be underrated: More engaging stories may interest adults (parents, teachers, and so on) more; their interest or disinterest will be communicated to children. It is not surprising that many of the enduring children's stories, e.g., "Hansel and Gretel," can be shown to have complexities that allow multiple levels of interpretation (see Bettelheim, 1976; Bruce & Newman, 1978; also, Newman, 1980, for a similar analysis of Sesame Street skits).

Text Design and Selection

Finally, we come to the issues of most concern to publishers and to those who select texts for children to read. The data presented and reviewed here do not provide recipes for text design or selection, but they do suggest some considerations that should become part of the process. There are four of these.

First, if we want the stories designed for learning-to-read to match the stories that skilled readers are expected to be able to read (and that some children read independently), then we should either expand the range of story types within basals or supplement them with trade books. Second, if we want to maintain basal stories as they

are and not supplement them, then we should be aware that children will not be exposed to many of the story types that they will surely encounter during the transition to skilled reading. The subsequent encounters may then require special attention from teachers. Third, if we want basal stories to be more engaging for children, then we should probably move in the direction of the trade book stories in our sample, i.e., more interpersonal and internal conflict, greater inside views, and more engaged narration. Also, there should be a greater variety of story characteristics in the basals. Fourth, and finally, we should be aware of a text's characteristics with respect to features such as conflict, inside view and rhetorical structure. This awareness should influence how the text is presented, what questions are asked of the student, and what difficulties or responses we expect.

Conclusion

Textbooks, including basal reading series, have always, and perhaps even more in recent years (Bowler, 1978; Thompson, 1980), been scrutinized by groups with moral, political, religious, or occasionally, educational agendas to fulfill. In addition, the increasing use of readability formulas has added new linguistic constraints to the textbook design and editing process. The accumulation of such constraints makes it increasingly difficult to achieve primary educational goals,

such as development of positive attitudes about reading, and learning the essential skills for reading. Texts that meet all the constraints may ultimately fail in terms of their primary purpose. The research reported here supports this gloomy forecast.

One could interpret this research and our recommendations as the attempt to impose one or more set of constraints. That is, publishers now have to worry about point of view types as well as about such things as not denigrating Paul Revere, not using street talk, or not mentioning divorce (Clark, 1981). That interpretation would be wrong. Rather than adding constraints of a new order, these analyses suggest that the relatively less constrained trade books may come closer to meeting what should be the primary goals for the basals. Of course, basal series are what most children read today. What we should do is to ensure that when choices about the design or selection of a passage for a series are made, we not lose sight of its educational purpose.

Our studies of children's stories are highlighting features which may account for reader involvement with characters and the author, for reader enjoyment, and for difficulty in comprehension. These features have traditionally been viewed as being in the domain of literary analysis rather than that of reading research, though they have direct implications for reading. We believe it is useful to continue this exploration, and plan to expand our survey of children's

texts. We also plan experiments to investigate directly the effect of the textual features we have defined on children's comprehension and involvement with reading.

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Footnote

[1]A comparison among different types of trade books was not a major aim of this study. However, it is interesting to note that books from the Children's Choices lists were more likely to have interpersonal and internal conflicts, had higher amounts of inside view, and were more likely to have engaged narration.

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